



The Independent Advisory Panel (IAP) Army Foundation College, Harrogate

ANNUAL REPORT 2010 to 2011

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Foreword by the Chairman

I am delighted to introduce the 2011 Annual Report, having just taken over from Della Cannings QPM who served with distinction as Chair of the Independent Advisory Panel from 2003 onwards. We are in the process of refreshing the membership of the IAP, so the next Annual Report will contain a number of new names.

A group of individuals drawn from a wide range of professional backgrounds in the community share a common concern as IAP members, which is to provide an independent source of assurance for all concerned that Junior Soldiers have the most positive experience possible whilst at the Army Foundation College in Harrogate. Our role is to praise the good things we find and to ask questions where and when we need to, through regular IAP meetings with the Commanding Officer and Company Commanders and through the writing of Activity Reports after each visit we make. I would like to thank all current and departing members for their commitment and support to the IAP during 2011.

Kevin McAleese CBE
Chairman, December 2011

The Military Covenant

Soldiers will be called upon to make personal sacrifices – including the ultimate sacrifice – in the service of the Nation. In putting the needs of the Nation and the Army before their own, they forego some of the rights enjoyed by those outside the Armed Forces. In return, British soldiers must always be able to expect fair treatment, to be valued and respected as individuals, and that they (and their families) will be sustained and rewarded by commensurate terms and conditions of service. In the same way the unique nature of military land operations means that the Army differs from all other institutions, and must be sustained and provided for accordingly by the Nation. This mutual obligation forms the Military Covenant between the Nation, the Army and each individual soldier; an unbreakable common bond of identity, loyalty and responsibility which has sustained the Army throughout its history. It has perhaps its greatest manifestation in the annual commemoration of Armistice Day, when the Nation keeps covenant with those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives in action.

‘Soldiering, The Military Covenant’ April 2000, MoD

IAP Members

Mr Robert McKenzie Johnston

Retired Headmaster

Mr Paul Nee

Retired Associate Director, Procter and Gamble

Mrs Beverley Twizell

Retired Teacher, Wetherby Youth Offenders Institute.

Ms Sue Symington

Businesswoman, Knaresborough

New Members

We were pleased to welcome two new members to the IAP this year:

Mr Ciaran McGuigan

Head of Examinations and Assessment National Policing Improvement Agency

Mr Kevin McAleese CBE

Chairman, NHS North Yorkshire and York

Ex officio

Colonel Michelle Clays, USAF

Commander, Menwith Hill Station

Represented by Lt Col Ken McRae, US Army since Nov 2011

The following IAP Members retired from the Panel during 2011

Cllr Nick Brown

Official representative of Harrogate Borough Council, Councillor for Newby Ward

Ms Della M Cannings QPM

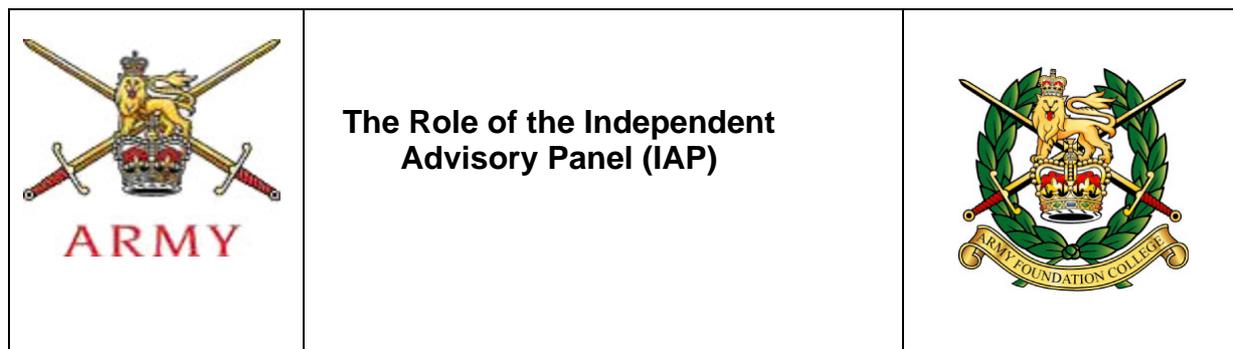
IAP Chairman 2003 – 2011

Mr James Foxwell

Head Teacher, Romanby Primary School, Northallerton

Jean McQuarrie

Chief Editor, Ackrills Newspaper Group



The aim of the IAP is to provide an independent, non-statutory source of advice, challenge, encouragement and support to the Army Foundation College, Harrogate, in order to exchange information, provide feedback and assist in identifying possible areas for improvement. This is a demanding aim, but one that should ensure that real benefit is given to both the College's commanders and its Junior Soldiers (some 1400+ each year) in training.

The independence of the Members is vital. The Members bring a breadth of expertise and professionalism from the public service, the commercial world, education and the military.

Members are required to provide a report on activities they undertake. These reports acknowledge positive work that is observed, as well as recording issues of concern or for discussion and to make recommendations where applicable. All the reports are made available to each member and the recommendations are entered into an Action Matrix, maintained by the Adjutant. The Matrix has been developed to allow the monitoring of subsequent actions taken by the College or an explanation as to why there was not a need for action. During the year, 44 new observations have been added to the Matrix of which 13 remain "open" – still be actioned. Since the commencement of the Matrix in August 2007 there have been a total of 72 observations, with 59 "closed" as receiving a satisfactory response or action.

Members meet at least quarterly with the Commanding Officer and Company Commanders, where specific themes and issues are explored in greater depth. Members do meet separately when necessary to discuss issues ahead of the joint meeting.

Each Member is assigned to a Company in order to manage the opportunities for them to explore all aspects of the training and care of the Junior Soldiers and the work of all staff. The army has decided that Criminal Record Bureau checks of Members are not required.

The IAP Members also attended a wide variety of AFC (H) functions and thank the Commanding Officer for extending such invitations that ensure Members are involved in the activities of the College.

Aspects of life at the College as reported by IAP members

The permanent staff

I have continued to spend most of my visits listening to the Permanent Staff (the instructors).

I remain convinced that each and every member of the permanent staff I have met, from the most senior to the most junior, feels that the Army Foundation College is one of the most worthwhile jobs he or she has ever done. They recognize how important their role is in training and educating the junior soldiers, and work long and hard to ensure they deliver the best they possibly can. They find the leadership opportunities as trainers intensely satisfying, and enjoy competing within their companies and across the College to make their training team (platoon) the best. They are strongly on the side of the Junior Soldiers, even when the Junior Soldiers get it wrong (as they must do if they are to learn how to get it right). Their loyalty to their Junior Soldiers is total and unequivocal. The Junior Soldiers could not ask for a more dedicated and committed training staff. The weakest Junior Soldier is as important to them as the strongest. They are teaching and living true team spirit.

They know that their professional opinions are respected and sought, by the Commanding Officer downwards. They have confidence in the chain of command; they feel that communications work well both upwards and downwards. As a result they accept decisions willingly and follow College policy carefully and sensibly (while still, correctly, continuing to challenge policy if they think it is wrong). Many permanent staff have told me that their job at the AFC is one of the most satisfying they have ever done. Several were instructors at the AFC in a lower rank, and have asked to return to the AFC on promotion.

I judge the morale of the Permanent Staff to be very high, and believe this high morale acts entirely to the benefit of the Junior Soldiers. The College is extremely well led and managed. The evident pride taken in their jobs by the Permanent Staff is reflected in the high professional standards, enthusiasm and positive outlook of the graduating Junior Soldiers. The Junior Soldiers are in very safe and capable hands.

Robert McKenzie Johnson

The Facebook page

The AFC (Harrogate) "official" Facebook page was launched in May 2010 in recognition of the growing interest in this form of communication between JS and their loved ones evidenced by a thriving "unofficial" site which had attracted over 600 members. Today, more than 4,000 users are active and the medium has become a beneficial aspect of everyday life at the AFC. Interestingly, the ITG (Initial Training Group) of which the AFC (Harrogate) is part have now mandated that all their establishments follow suit and launch their own versions.

IAP members view this development very positively while also recognizing that the open nature of the facility brings with it some challenges and the requirement to proactively manage or respond to postings which occur can 24 hours per day, 7 days per week – the AFC (Harrogate) do this well and should be congratulated for providing such an efficient and inclusive service.

For IAP members, the site brings additional, real-time insight into how JS and their families are feeling about life at the college and dealing with the various phases of the journey through the course. These range from the challenges of coping with the initial 6 weeks - where life as it was is replaced by something completely unfamiliar! - to the excitement of

moving through the critical phases of the programme, all building towards completion and then graduation.

It provides an additional reference point when talking with them as part of the usual IAP engagement and the facility to feel part of the college more frequently - albeit on a remote basis. Where issues are posted, or themes developing which may give cause for concern, the IAP are able to follow up directly with staff in order to gain reassurance that all is in order.

From what we see, the Command at the AFC welcome the transparency that Facebook provides and aim to inform, support or correct postings in a timely manner. Occasionally, these are quite critical and reflect concern over a matter - staff look into such instances quickly and aim to respond to reassure the person posting as well as others who may be worried about what they have read. This usually works well and is often done in parallel with a phone call to provide further detail as required. Staff are at pains to point out that if any family members are concerned about matters affecting their son or daughter, posting on facebook is fine but a direct phone call to the college is usually the best way of raising, and hopefully dealing with such things.

The AFC Facebook page has become part of college life – it is a useful and informative addition to the experience for all key stakeholders. Reading the postings provides a fascinating insight and the overwhelming feeling that this is an establishment of which we should be proud. It is a place fit to accept the responsibility of developing the brave young men and women prepared to train for a future in the Army.

Paul Nee

A new member

I joined the Independent Advisory Panel (IAP) at Harrogate Foundation College in July 2011 and was attached to Alamein Company alongside a more experienced IAP member, Paul Nee. I was warmly welcomed into Alamein Company for an induction by the Company Commander. I visited some platoon “lines” where the JS live when they are off duty, and was struck by how clean they were and how unsurprising were the posters that boy soldiers had on their walls. The JS were refreshingly like any other young people in their downtime, liking loud music and equally loud conversation when left to their own devices. I also noticed how quickly the JS developed the ability to see an NCO or officer coming and stiffened their bearing ready for a salute or recognition, whether in uniform or not. I assume that, like marching smartly, that ability to acknowledge authority by second nature had to be learned very quickly in the first few weeks at the College, rather than arriving with them!

What I didn’t notice straightaway, but which struck me forcibly when I spent a morning observing the education programme, was that the JS are only ever called by their surnames, whether in the classroom, in the lines or on the parade square at the College. Indeed, I learned later that this is regarded as entirely normal. I had lunch with a group of six JS in the cookhouse a few weeks ago, where of course they always sit in their platoon groups which have become their friendship groups, and one admitted that he didn’t know the first names of four of the five other JS he had been with since January, nor did he see the need to. He went on to comment how strange it was when you went home because in the “civvy world” only first names are used amongst friends and family.

Since July I have spent a day on the ranges at Strensall, a day observing the education programme, a battlefield casualty exercise and an extended drill session and then a “Morality in Conflict” session with the Padre talking about how and why atrocities happen. In

my experience the JS are unfailingly polite when asked about their experiences at the College and refreshingly honest about what they enjoy and what they struggle with. It's clear that school was a very negative experience for many of them, so the initial reaction of some is to recoil from more education and just to want to do "soldierly" things like drills, exercises and weapons training. However, based on my conversations I'm clear that many of them quickly come to appreciate that the education programme is not at all like school, that they're treated as young adults and that what they are getting is a second chance to succeed, which so many of them then go on to do.

I have been hugely impressed by the efforts the permanent military and civilian staff go to oversee the welfare of each JS as an individual. I've heard about the difficult news from home which is carefully broken, the compassionate leave arranged, the injuries on exercise which are treated carefully and the homesickness and doubt which plagues some of the young men and the care which is taken to keep them on the straight and narrow. There is a strong pastoral element to the education sessions, where JS can chat to their lecturers about something they might not to military staff. It's also clear that the WRVS Centre also performs a valuable listening and passporting service for any individuals who are struggling. Above all, I have found a strong sense of pride in success in all the JS I have met and talked to, and they are clearly aware that their welfare is taken seriously at the College.

Kevin McAleese

Realities of War

At the very start of this intake, the Company Commander asked me to join Waterloo Company's Realities of War educational visit to Normandy. He invited me because he knew that the experience would enable me to see, still more clearly,

- The life of a junior soldier
- The leadership of a platoon
- The nature of learning for Junior Soldiers.
- The realities of war.

He was absolutely right. I was not disappointed. I was attached to 4 Platoon, Waterloo Company, for the duration of the visit. This could, no doubt, have been awkward or inconvenient for them. It's vitally important that I note, that from the very start the platoon made me absolutely welcome and included me in all of their activities and conversations without any hesitation or reservation

I owe a huge thank you to the platoon commander who throughout the trip answered my endless questions and patiently enabled me to learn alongside the junior soldiers. I must also mention the permanent staff, all of whom willingly shared their thoughts and opinions throughout the trip. The JS were pretty excited about their trip. It's a long journey but they remained in good, positive spirits throughout the 17 hour journey to our hotel. I was hugely impressed by the way they got along with each other, followed instructions and timing to the letter, and treated one another with respect. This applies to the entire trip.

My sense of the JS is that they are incredibly boundaried in their behaviours- when they were given time to 'play' they made the very most of it. When they were required to pay attention and think, they did their very best.

I had an opportunity to talk with nearly all of the JS in the platoon over the course of the visit. The platoon has a complete cross section of young men- including some colourful characters! It's clear that the JS still have one foot in 'childhood- for example gleefully buying

water pistols at a supermarket – and one foot in the very adult world of the army, for example putting on incredibly smart suits and behaving impeccably at the Bayeux War Graves. The transition from young man to soldier is taking place each day- each day it seemed the JS moved closer to their adult future.

Particularly effective – and memorable - were the exercises where the junior soldiers contributed- becoming a mulberry harbour for example, or taking on the identities of countries in the world in a physical model. The training officer delivered a particularly excellent overview of the history of the second world war on our first morning. Each formal learning experience was supported by a ‘modern day’ account of how that activity could work in modern warfare. This was powerful and the JS paid great attention to this.

There were 4 occasions when the JS did presentations themselves: In each case these were excellent. They had been incredibly well trained prepared by the permanent staff.

The JS are physically strong and robust. The tour gave them an insight into the young men who fought in the war- and died. That they too had been robust carefree young men. I can see that the connection is hard to make for the JS. They do, of course, think they are invincible. That said, there were many moments when the JS were thoughtful and reflective, for example when visiting the German cemetery.

For many of the JS I spoke with, it is a reality that they will go to Afghanistan next year. No one showed reticence about this- most looking forward to it. The permanent staff spoke openly about their own experiences and their own fears when serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. This was powerful for the JS and the openness of the permanent staff gave them confidence to feel both brave and afraid simultaneously.

The tour worked incredibly hard to share the tactics, strategies and training for warfare. I am in no doubt that this practical knowledge was absorbed carefully and that learning took place. I felt it was real privilege to be part of the training. The JS tried really hard all the time. I think it was hard work for them. They did struggle to take it all in all of the time. But my impression was, they didn’t give up! They paid attention fully and properly.

It seems to me that the learning experience works on a number of different levels.

There is the immediate learning- but much more importantly I think it is the very long term impressions and understandings which this trip provided that are the foundation of building effective soldiers. I am in no doubt that our JS had a “life experience” while they were on the tour which will contribute to enabling them to become good soldiers, and good men.

Conclusions

It is hard to make any kind of criticism of this experience. I have been hugely impressed.

I have also been hugely assured that the JS in 4 Platoon, Waterloo Company, are treated fairly and firmly and with appropriate respect. Any criticism would be that it is an incredibly long journey and that some of the learning is a stretch for some of the JS. This criticism however is absolutely trivial in the context of the overall JS experience.

Sue Symington

TAC/EX 2 Visit to Otterburn, Northumberland

It was with some trepidation that I found myself lying in a field behind a mound of grass and thistles at 5am on the morning of 25th May 2011 . I was with Cambrai Company on the final day of TAC/EX 2 in Otterburn, Northumberland with the intention of observing a series of dawn attacks.

The section attacks are the highlights of a four day exercise with the purpose of honing the JS' skills and drills including; making camp, sleeping under plastic sheets, coping with ration packs, day exercises, night-time exercises, sentry duties and weapon maintenance.

Wrapped in a warm, borrowed camouflage "parka" and with ear protectors clamped over my ears, I was in hiding with two female JS who were playing the roles of the enemy position, lying in wait for the approaching section. As the section cautiously approached, the enemy took aim and began to fire. The section had to draw on all the skills and drills they had been taught in the previous nine months to respond to the attack.

The attacking section outmanoeuvred the enemy, overpowered them, disarmed them and regrouped. They informed one another about their ammunition situation and planned their forward moves. Just when they appeared to think that their final destination was in sight and all was well, they came under another attack from a second enemy position, hiding behind a ramshackle stone wall.

From my vantage point, I watched the section attack uphill, overpower the enemy and carry out safety procedures on their weapons. In talking with the JS after the attacks they were exhausted but exhilarated by their performance and I was mightily impressed.

The JS were later due to discuss the attacks with the PS in an After Action Review Analysis and discover which elements of the attacks worked and which could be improved upon. With this in mind I suggested that in future, videoing each attack (which could then be played back to the JS as a visual reminder) would be a useful teaching method enabling JS to critically appraise their own and fellow JS' attacks.

The Company Commander acted on this suggestion for the following TAC/EX disguising the Permanent Staff as members of the press to add reality to the filming process!

Another extremely interesting and worthwhile experience with AFC that inspired confidence in the excellent if challenging training provided to the JS.

Bev Twizell

Commanding Officer's Response

I thank the members of the Army Foundation College IAP for this, the first annual report during my tenure in Command.

At a time when the Initial Training Group and the College are implementing a significant degree of both structural and procedural change the continued provision of scrutiny, challenge and advice that the IAP provide is both welcomed and appreciated.

Additionally, I would emphasise that despite the appropriately independent nature of the IAP it is still very much considered to be a part of the AFC team; but with the advantage of being able to provide objective views and advice from a alternative perspective, unconstrained by the 'sometime' clutter of the routine adherence to policy and general administration which can, occasionally, distort the focus of those engaged in the College on a daily basis.

It is not lost on me or my staff that the panel members' involvement is both voluntary and unpaid – there could be no clearer indication of their personal commitment to public service and their community.

I very much look forward to continuing to develop the excellent working relationship that the Army Foundation College has with its Independent Advisory Panel.

Lt Col KD Sharifi QRL

IAP Contact Details

The IAP is very appreciative of the secretarial support received from the Adjutant at AFC (H), Captain Ed Lyons:

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